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Commentary

The Social Sciences and the Modernization of China*

Mei Yi**

I would like to say something about the position of the social sciences in China in relation to the country's modernization, in the course of which I will also touch on what we are doing at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Perhaps I should begin by giving a brief account of the history of the social sciences in China, which will provide the background for what is going on today.

In China, the term "social sciences" is used in a broader sense than it is in the English language. It covers the humanities as well as the social sciences. Works on philosophy, political science, ethics, economics, and jurisprudence appeared in China some 2,500 years ago. The views of the nobility and its controversies on the rights and wrongs of political and legal institutions are to be found in such writings as *Zuo Qiuning's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Zuo Zhuan*) and *A Collection of Comments from Various States* (*Guo Yu*), both dealing with the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.), a period of transition from slavery to feudalism. The teachings of Confucius became the dominant ideology in the long period in which feudalism prevailed. Shang Yang (c. 390-338 B.C.), famous statesman and jurist, analyzed in his works the interrelationships among politics, law, culture, and military affairs. Sima Qian (c. 145-90 B.C.), the great historian and man of letters, was the first to stress the importance of factual evidence in historical research. It was he who laid the framework

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of scientific historiography by distinguishing history from legend and quasi-history. While providing comprehensive records of the socio-economic conditions and people's life before and up to his time, he made efforts to derive, from the political changes in ancient China, laws governing the rise and fall of dynastic regimes.

A look at China's 2,500 year-old academic legacy reveals a distinctive feature of Chinese learning, that is, an emphasis on the study of the laws of nature coupled with strong and persistent interests in the philosophy of life, in society, and in man's social responsibilities. In terms of the theory of knowledge, there has been a tireless search for the relationship between knowing and doing, for truth in the concrete, and for dialectical thinking. Such a legacy has produced a great impact on Chinese culture and learning, discernible even today.

It was only about a century ago, late in the 19th century, that the Chinese opened their eyes to the social sciences of the West, much later than they came into contact with the natural sciences brought in by Western missionaries. In 1898, the well-known Chinese scholar Yan Fu began publishing his translations of the *Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith and the works of Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, and Montesquieu. Just like social scientists of the West who believed that their theories were the gospel of social progress, Yan Fu and the Chinese intellectuals of his time were convinced that the political and economic theories of the West defined laws as irresistible as the laws of nature discovered by Copernicus and Newton. This conviction, however, was shaken by a series of historical events, particularly the political fiascos China suffered after World War I and the resulting worries about the nation's destiny. Marxism was introduced into China at this time. Chinese social scientists began to turn to Marxism and eventually found a way out for their country.

Chinese history in the last hundred years has made possible the advances in China's new social sciences. From the Sino-British Opium War of 1840-42 to the Japanese invasion in the 1930's, China suffered defeat in eight wars unleashed by foreign aggressors. For a whole century, the Chinese people were confronted with the overriding issue of national survival. This compelled Chinese social scientists to concentrate on pressing social and political issues and on the application of their conclusions. Such a line of action was dictated by their times, and the result was a close integration of theory and practice. Almost every re-

search effort was aimed at finding a way out for the nation. To attain this aim, our predecessors went through hard struggles along the lines of different ideologies. A series of struggles to save the country, from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom to the democratic revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, ended in failure. The poverty of the masses worsened, and the nation sank ever deeper into the abyss of misery. It was only after 1919, when Marxism was introduced into China, that Chinese social scientists acquired, by combining its theories with China's realities, an integral ideological system for observing the objective world and working out ways to change China. A bitter struggle continued for thirty years, in which the bones of the fallen ones were piled up like mountains. This was the cost at which victory was achieved in the Chinese revolution and advances were made in China's new social sciences prior to the era of the People's Republic of China. Social sciences have developed in present day China on the basis of a legacy of 2,500 years, in particular, the legacy of the 100 years preceding the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Even under the People's Republic of China, however, social sciences in China have followed a difficult, zigzag course. First, they were seriously affected by a rigid dogmatism which came primarily from a foreign source and by the personality cult which originated mainly at home. The problems grew really serious during the so-called Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, during which independent scientific thinking was banned, research institutes were dissolved, large numbers of social scientists, including nearly all the better-known ones, were subjected to several years of persecution, and there was practically no research work of which to speak. Things did not return to normal until 1977.

It was also in 1977 that the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was established. It was formed on the bases of the institutes of philosophy and social sciences, which had originally belonged to the Chinese Academy of Sciences (*Academia Sinica*). This showed that more importance was being attached to the social sciences and that steps were being taken to accelerate their development.

Before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were only three institutes of social sciences in the country—the Institute of History and Philology, the Institute of Sociology in Nanking (Nanjing), and the Institute of History in Peiping (Beijing), with a total of less than 100 researchers.

There was a Central Academy in Yan'an, for a long time the seat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, but it was small in scale and was devoted mainly to the study of history and philosophy. In 1955, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, formed under the People's Republic of China, initiated its Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, which had a research staff of 1,000 working in fifteen institutes, including those of philosophy, history, economics, literature, philosophy, law, ethnology, and world economics. Established on this basis, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences now has thirty-three institutes with a total research staff of over 3,600. Local academies of social sciences have been set up in the provinces, including the Tibet Autonomous Region, with a total of 190 research departments and 4,200 researchers. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and its local equivalents account for half of the full-time researchers in the social sciences in the country. The Academy operates a graduate school and the China Social Science Publishing House, which has published, in the past seven years, 15,000 research works and collections of papers, nearly 20,000 theses, over 1,900 fact-finding reports, and 172 dictionaries and reference books in addition to over 1,200 translated works of social sciences of foreign countries and 4,900 volumes of reference material. The development in the social sciences in recent years reflects the advances in China's socialist reconstruction and the growth in its international contacts. It is unprecedented in the scale of undertakings, the breadth and depth of research work, and the usefulness to the country.

Chinese social scientists regard service to the country's socialist modernization as their foremost task. In 1978, China decided to shift the focus in its work to socialist modernization. This provided a new horizon for social scientists, who began to look for the solutions to questions of modernization.

They must, first of all, clear the moral obstacles to socialist modernization, which is a tough job in China's circumstances. In Europe, it took almost 500 years to prepare the moral ground for the transition from feudal society to modern capitalist society. This period extended from the humanistic upsurge during the Renaissance of the 14th-16th centuries and the Reformation of the 16th century to the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century and the Enlightenment of the 18th century. In China, feudalism lasted at least twice as long as it did in Europe, and was followed by a semi-colonial period of 100 years.

Thus China has to go through a long process of moral emancipation before it can enter a modern socialist society.

A clear-cut slogan against feudalism was raised for the first time during the May Fourth Movement of 1919, a movement for new culture based on the promotion of science and democracy. As a movement for the emancipation of people's minds, it prepared the moral ground for China's new-democratic revolution.

Another movement for moral emancipation took place in Yan'an during 1942-44 in the Communist Party's movement to rectify its own style, which stressed the need to apply Marxism in light of China's realities and eliminate the rigidities of dogmatism. The movement prepared the moral ground for victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and in the Chinese People's War of Liberation.

A new movement for moral emancipation is needed for the present era of socialist modernization. Such a movement would free people's minds from the manacles of dogmatism and the personality cult, both of which prevailed in China for a long time, and from the influences of the small producer's mentality, the patriarchal system, and the semi-colonial heritage of the country. It would give full play to people's wisdom and initiative.

This explains the background of the 1978 nationwide discussion of the thesis "practice is the sole criterion of truth," which was advanced by some social scientists. Criticism of the attempt to turn Marxism into a theological dogma marked the beginning of the new movement for moral emancipation and created a prerequisite for socialist modernization. China's social scientists voiced support for the slogan raised by Deng Xiaoping: "Emancipate our minds, use our heads, and unite as one in looking forward to the future." The slogan provided guidance for the moral emancipation movement and pushed it forward. It enabled social scientists to free themselves from ideological fetters and take up major theoretical and practical questions of socialist modernization with a free hand. The greatness of Marxism lies in the correct stand, viewpoint, and method it shows us, but it does not and cannot give ready-made answers to our specific questions. Similarly, socialism shows the way forward for humanity, but it does not limit us to a single unchangeable pattern. Conditions vary from one country to another, and it is ridiculous for anyone to claim that his pattern is the only correct one. A mechanical imitation of the experi-

ence and pattern of another country always leads to failure, for which we have paid a heavy price.

Social science research in China has acquired greater vitality than ever before amid the movement for moral emancipation. Questions once regarded as untouchable are being raised, and conclusions supposed to be indisputable are being reexamined. There was a time when academic questions were confused with political ones, and those who expressed dissenting opinions came under fire as reactionaries. Today we draw a clear-cut line between academic and political issues, and encourage free debate on academic questions under the policy of "let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools contend." New advances are being made in philosophy and other fields of study through the integration of theory and practice, providing a moral impetus to socialist modernization.

Much attention is being focused on economic research to find answers to questions arising from modernization. As early as 1978, leading economists took exception to the view that regarded commodities as a vice. They advocated the promotion of a commodity economy and the use of the market mechanism as a supplement to our planned economy. This would have been inconceivable under previous circumstances. In 1979, under the sponsorship of the State Council, the Central People's Government, economists began a systematic study of questions of readjusting and restructuring the economy, streamlining the management of business enterprises, and updating technology. They proposed policies and measures on the basis of factual investigations and theoretical research. While working out the strategic objectives, focuses, and steps for developing China's economy, they had to answer a number of vital questions. For instance, what would be the proper way to quadruple China's industrial and agricultural production by the end of the present century? Should we, as we had done in the previous thirty years or so, keep increasing production capacities by adding new factories, or should we achieve our purpose by updating the technologies of existing enterprises? Painstaking studies tipped the balance in favor of the latter, which meant freedom from long-prevailing foreign influence. For many years, we used the projected rises in the production of iron, steel, coal, and other means of production as the main targets in national economic planning, while paying insufficient attention to the people's growing economic and cultural requirements. This has also been changed. Our present economic planning proceeds

from the people's demand for consumer goods, on the basis of which increases in the means of production are planned. By the end of the current century, per capita income in China is expected to rise to the equivalent of \$800-\$1,000 United States dollars. This will be the focus of national endeavor in the next fifteen years, and it provides the basis for working out all other targets.

Investigating China's conditions, our economists have brought up scientifically-based ideas for national policy making. Economists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences take a direct part in the formulation of economic policies. They have also provided investigative reports, policy proposals, reform plans, academic theses, and other works on the ongoing reform of the economic structure. Many of their ideas have been adopted by the government. Some specialists have joined government departments and business enterprises in reform experiments and in summarizing and popularizing pioneer experiences. Meanwhile, our economists have also gone deeper into economic theories. Some of the questions under study are: While adhering to the principle of a planned economy, should we give full recognition to the legitimacy of commodity production and circulation and make the best use of the law of value? Why is it necessary, under a predominant system of public ownership, to have a variety of forms of ownership and ways of operation? How should we interpret the nature and the role of the principle of material incentive and the principle of distribution according to work? Inquiries into questions like these are considered necessary for building socialism with Chinese characteristics.

For a time, Chinese laws were trampled underfoot, people received no legal protection, and there was naturally no research in the science of law of which to speak. A complete change has taken place, a change won at the cost of blood. "Give full play to democracy, build a sound legal system"—this is a major task confronting the nation. Democracy and government by law are inseparable. There cannot be a sound legal system without a high level of democracy, and the people's democratic rights cannot be guaranteed unless they are protected by law. Our present slogan is "equality before the law." No political party, not even the Communist Party, and no individual, not even a leader of the Party or the state, is allowed to violate the People's Republic of China's Constitution in words or deeds. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping said it was necessary to see to

it "that there are laws to go by, that they are observed and strictly enforced, and that violators are brought to book." Because of a weak consciousness of law and the inadequacies in our laws, there are still cases in which people do not abide by the laws and in which violators are not brought to justice. Some laws are still in the making, such as the Law on State Industrial Enterprises, the Labor Law, and the Agrarian Law. Our government and legal experts take a most serious attitude toward lawmaking, seeing to it that the laws enacted are circumspect, consistent, and authoritative. Researchers of the Institute of Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences took part in the drafting and revision of the People's Republic of China's Constitution. They have taken part in the making of other laws and are continuing to do so. They have been studying theoretical and practical questions connected with the building of a sound legal system in China. More has been done recently in the study of economic legislation and international law. Some theoretical achievements have been made in the study of the relationship between democracy and government by law, and of government by law versus government by the will of the individual, among other issues.

The key to modernization is the modernization of people. Our goal is to build up China as a modern socialist country with a high level of civilization and democracy. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to bring about a sharp improvement in the whole nation's knowledge of science and culture and in its moral, political, and ethical standards. This is a historic task. China is still at the beginning of this process. Our people are working hard to grasp the sciences of production and to raise their moral and cultural standards. Visitors to China have seen how the Chinese, particularly the younger generation, try to satisfy their thirst for knowledge. Social scientists are aware of their responsibility for this effort and are contributing to it.

China is an economically backward country with one billion people. By the end of this century, the modernization endeavor will only place us at a medium level of development, and much more will have to be done in the next century. It goes without saying that we need a peaceful environment for achieving our goal. We hope to enhance our friendship with the people of all countries and to live in peace with all countries. The Chinese people have suffered more than enough from war. We are still being threatened. For instance, the roar of guns can still be heard along our borders. History proves

that as long as hegemonic powers exist, there can be no guarantee for peace. We are ready to join various countries in a united effort to oppose the doctrine of hegemony in any form and to safeguard world peace. Chinese social scientists, particularly those specializing in international relations, which are being studied in eight institutes under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, concern themselves with this big issue. While working for understanding and friendship between China and other countries, they look into the history and present state of the world's major issues and figure out ways to ensure world peace.

China is a developing country that remains backward in an economic and cultural sense. In the social sciences, too, we remain backward. Our social sciences stand in need of modernization just as our country does as a whole. While keeping to a socialist orientation, we must learn from the strong points of social sciences in other countries. There are still quite a few blank spaces and weak links in our social science studies. For instance, we have only just begun to study some new subjects and have not started on others in international law, both public and private. As far as research methods are concerned, we have long been accustomed to doing studies in one separate field or another and have seldom undertaken comprehensive studies embracing several fields or comparative studies. We are lagging still farther behind in data storage and indexing. We hope to promote the modernization of our social science studies through international academic exchange.

A few years ago, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences put an end to its seclusion and adopted a policy of opening its doors to the outside world. This enabled us to benefit from the valuable achievements of our colleagues in various countries. Our Academy has established ties with social science institutions and academic societies in more than thirty countries and regions, and has signed bilateral agreements for academic exchange with academic institutions or societies of more than a dozen countries. We are taking part in more and more international or regional academic conferences. We are pleased to have established close ties with your university. On behalf of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, I wish to thank the executives and professors of your university for helping and looking after the visiting scholars and graduate students we have sent. We look forward to a further growth of our relations. Regrettably, limited by our resources, we are unable to meet many of the requests of our foreign friends for academic

exchange. As China makes economic progress, however, our exchange in the social sciences with other countries is bound to grow.